



Coast Guard Flag Voice 41

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF RETENTION

IT'S NOT SOMEBODY ELSE'S PROBLEM!

CAPT Jim Evans, Chief, Office of Aeronautical Engineering (G-SEA), provided these thoughts in a recent E-mail. They apply Service-wide and I want to share them with everyone. Jim writes:

"I just returned from our semi-annual Aviation Repair & Supply Center (ARSC) and Offices of Aeronautical Engineering (G-SEA) and Aviation Management (G-OCA) Program Review in Yorktown. Workforce issues commanded a lot of attention, and rightly so. I'd like to share a few thoughts and observations with you.

A common theme I hear is that we are critically short of those at the heart of our workforce -- the E5s, for example. We have lots of junior E4s and enough senior petty officers to fill our demands. Our shortage is where we need them most -- the experienced E5 technician. We (CGHQ and Recruiting Command) can keep "A" Schools filled to the brim, but if we let retention slip, we'll never gain ground.

I'd like to put a different spin on the retention issue. My sense is that a lot of young folks are entering the CG these days with no intention of staying beyond 4 to 6 years. They want the training and the education benefits. These folks are eager to learn and work and generally like the CG. I believe our challenge is not to just "roll over" on their intentions, but to mentor and work with these folks to convince them of a bright future in the CG. I'm sure you've heard lots of ex-Coasties, as I have, express their regrets at leaving the Service, to find the grass really isn't greener on the other side of the fence.

I have some suggestions.

Arrange for a sharp, well informed expert to provide a training session on the value of the perks we take for granted, such as 30 days leave/year, fully paid pension (I know it's only 35% at 20, but I'm optimistic that'll go to 50% soon), subsidized medical and SGLI, disability & survivor benefits (they're a LOT better than some of you may realize), job security, etc.

Aggressively mentor those who have expressed an interest to RELAD. I believe lots of folks pass the word they're going to RELAD and are secretly looking for somebody to challenge their intent.

Train like there's no tomorrow. I've lived through a lot of training that adds NO value -- a complete waste of time. We have to get past that. Focus on value added training -- the rest will take care of itself.

And lastly, focus on taking care of our folks. I know you're doing that every day. If you could have heard LCDR Phil Ross, who recently won the Witherspoon Leadership Award, speak at last week's award ceremony here at CGHQ, you would have heard the meaning of his message loud and clear -- the value of taking care of our folks comes back to us many times over.

My intent in writing this is to persuade you to take ownership of the retention issue. Recruiting Command can fill the "A" Schools. It's up to us -- the Program and Operational Commands -- to turn the tide on retention. We're closer to our folks than anybody else."

CAPT Evans does an excellent job of defining retention...it's not a human resources program issue but a human resources issue within every program and at every individual unit. He has some good suggestions too-and I know there are many more out there.

Another point about recruiting and filling the "A" Schools to produce new petty officers: it will take at least 5 and more like 10-plus years for these new people to gain the experience, skills, and knowledge to replace those leaving. Even "filling the workforce" in numbers over the next couple of years will look okay on paper, but not provide the qualified workforce to do our missions in the short term. Another way of putting this in context is to look at what would happen if all of a sudden we woke up one morning and found our entire capital plant gone - about \$20B of aircraft, cutters, boats, and facilities. I believe you would agree if we were given the money, with the efforts of our talented people, we could somehow replace it all within a few years. Although these assets wouldn't be exactly the same, we could get by and do most of our missions. Now, replay a similar scenario if we found all our people gone. I submit it would take us decades to rebuild the lost experiences, knowledge and skills and much of our expertise would be gone forever. Put another way, the cost of our human capital is virtually priceless, making the cost of the physical things we own pale in comparison.

Retaining our good people is paramount to the Coast Guard's health as a viable force.

On another note, it is with great pleasure I add my congratulations to the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary celebrating 60 years of promoting safe boating. Their contributions to preventing boating mishaps before they happen has undoubtedly saved countless lives and property, especially those of Team Coast Guard who didn't have to put themselves at risk!

Regards, FL Ames

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